

INFORMATION REPORT

CD NO.

25X1A

CONFIDENTIAL

COUNTRY Indochina.

SUBJECT Release of Hostage French Priests

DATE DISTR. 30 JAN 50

NO. OF PAGES 7

PLACE
ACQUIRED

NO. OF ENCLS.
(LISTED BELOW)

DATE OF INFO.

SUPPLEMENT TO
REPORT NO.

25X1A

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1. Five French priests who were among the hostages seized by the Viet Minh in December 1946 were released in mid-December 1949 at a point approximately 150 kilometers from Hanoi. Shortly after they were originally captured, the priests became separated from the several hundred other French civilian prisoners captured by the Ho Chi Minh forces and did not subsequently see any of those prisoners again. The priests were moved from place to place over a three-year period of captivity. For the most part they did not recognize their surroundings. They were never without a guard and had relatively little freedom of movement. They subsisted almost entirely on rice, although they were occasionally able to augment their diet with fish. They were not treated badly by their captors but general living conditions in the areas where they were held were very poor. One of the priests died of malaria. Morale among the Ho Chi Minh supporters was very high.
2. The priests do not know the reasons behind their release. An unidentified Ho Chi Minh Government official visited their encampment in November and, after discussing their general situation and condition, suggested that they write President Ho and ask to be returned to Hanoi. They wrote the letter and ten days later they were given new vestments. Shortly thereafter they were blindfolded and after a fairly short journey were released near a French post in the vicinity of Tuyen Quang.

This document is hereby regraded to CONFIDENTIAL in accordance with the letter of 18 October 1973 from the Director of Central Intelligence to the Archivist of the United States.

Next Review Date: 2008

Document No. _____
No Change in Status ☐ ☒
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Last Action: 78 9 6
Action: 78 9 6
Date: 5 JUN 1978 By: 0-9

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